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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, May 7, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "WHY MILK?" Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

--ooOoo--

The other day I saw on the street a child about three years old, who was pitifully bowlegged. She was a pretty little thing, too, except for those legs. But I couldn't concentrate on her curly blond hair and her big blue eyes. Those poor warped legs held me hypnotized.

And diet was undoubtedly the explanation for this little girl's bowed legs. A child specialist recently told me that no child is born with rickets. Rickets can develop only after birth and almost always because of the wrong diet.

There are three food elements which are involved in building a sturdy bone structure and sound teeth: calcium, phosphorus, and vitamin D.

Milk is the ideal source of these bone building minerals. A quart of it will assure the growing child of the day's calcium and phosphorus need. But even so, specialists in child feeding in the Bureau of Home Economics do not insist that every child have a quart of milk a day, ideal though that might be.

And their reason is that some children simply cannot drink that much and then eat the other necessary foods. You yourself have probably seen some youngster come to the table hot and thirsty and immediately drink 2 glasses of milk. The sheer bulk of those 2 glasses made him feel satisfied so that he merely toyed with the rest of the meal -- refused to eat the eggs prepared for the main course and the sliced oranges of the dessert.

But the oranges would have supplied the vitamin C which the milk lacked and the eggs had the iron and some vitamins not found in sufficient quantities in milk. Parents might give such a child only one glass of milk at the first of the meal and not let him have more until the end of the meal.

For these reasons Bureau of Home Economics scientists say: Give the child at least a pint of milk a day, and as much more as he can drink without sacrificing other dietary essentials. You can find malnutrition cases even among children who drink a quart of milk daily!

Of course, if the child drinks only a pint of milk a day, he must get the rest of his calcium need from other foods. For instance, from the green leafy vegetables like beet greens and cabbage, or from cheese.

An interesting fact about calcium is that the body turns it into bone most efficiently in the presence of vitamin D. If the child is low in vitamin D not all of the calcium and phosphorus brought into the body will be transformed into bony tissue. And milk itself has practically no vitamin D.

But fortunately there is in the human skin a substance called ergosterol, which is changed into vitamin D on exposure to ultra violet light. So the person who gets out in the sunlight long enough generates his own vitamin D. That's the reason doctors insist on babies having sun baths.

People who cannot get enough sunshine to have an adequate supply of vitamin D must get this food essential from other sources such as the fish-liver oils, eggs, salmon, and butter.

A teaspoon of high grade fish-liver oil a day gives an adequate amount of vitamin D for children. But the parent who faithfully sees to it that his children get their cod-liver oil or their sun baths, but who is indifferent to the quantity of milk or other calcium-rich foods they are getting may be doing them precious little good.

It would be like giving them a bow without any arrow to shoot in it. You might say that the vitamins in the cod-liver oil form the bow by which the minerals are shot into the bones! The child must have vitamin D but also calcium and phosphorus for the vitamin to work on.

Dental health for life is largely determined by the time a child is 6 years old. So for his first 6 years an adequate supply of milk or other calcium-rich foods and vitamin D are doubly necessary.

Milk is also desirable in the diet for its vitamin A content. A liberal supply of vitamin A is essential to vigorous health in both child and adult. It stimulates growth, and protects against one of the more serious eye diseases. Some nutritionists believe that it also prevents infections in the body.

Vitamin A deficiency in children is more common and more serious than is generally recognized. In a recent survey of Iowa school children, a fourth of those from the country, half of the village pupils, and half to three-fourths of the city children showed deficiency in vitamin A. These malnutrition cases were cured by the addition of cod-liver oil to their diet.

The quantity of vitamin A in milk varies considerably according to what the cow has been eating. Cows fed on good pastures have milk high in vitamin A. Those fed on grain and poor hay have little. It's the fat in the milk that contains all of this vitamin.

To summarize the child's daily dietary needs we might just say: Feed him a pint to a quart of milk, an egg, leafy green vegetables, and tomatoes or citrus fruit. And see that he gets plenty of sunshine.

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